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The Wilson Snipe

The Wilson Snipe, *Capella delicata*, is the bird that is known to the hunter and the public in general as the Jack Snipe. It received that name from the early Colonists on account of a similar bird by that name in the Old World. The ornithologists gave it its present official name in recognition of Alexander Wilson, the father of American ornithology and the first one to differentiate it from the Old World form.

It is distributed in its habitats throughout continental North America and in its fall migration reaches northern South America. However, most of its southward migration is only a short distance below the frost line, or, where conditions assure it of unfrozen mud in which to probe for food. It is an early spring migrant, following the retreating frost line into the north. Cold weather, however, is no handicap, for where spring waters keep ground unfrozen this snipe may remain quite far north.

I have found it near Dillon, Montana, in February in sub-zero weather, and there are authentic records of it wintering in British Columbia. It is a common winter visitant of our spring runs about the Salt Lake Valley.

Its habitat is fresh water marshes, moist meadows or pasture land springs, or other fresh water vegetated edges, and not the open shoreline like that of most other shore-birds, nor alkaline nor salt-water marshes, though in migration it may be found there and in a variety of other places. I have observed it on the lawn at Mount Olivet Cemetery, near Community Camp in Big Cottonwood Canyon, and in sage brush a half mile west of Utah Lake.

The Wilson Snipe and the Woodcock are the only two species of shore-birds on which is allowed an open shooting season. The Woodcock has a very restricted one, but the Wilson Snipe has a cross-country open season corresponding with that of the migratory waterfowl. There are several very good reasons why this shore-bird can maintain its population status in sufficient numbers to justify (at least in the judgment of Fish and Game Commissions) an open shooting season:

1st. Its wide distribution and nesting range, which is from coast to coast, and from the central tier of states to the sub-arctic.

2nd. Its choice of nesting sites, preferring grassy hummocks midst muddy or water surroundings. In this environment it seems able to bring a larger brood to maturity than other shore-birds that nest in the open where they may be preyed upon by predatory birds and their nests and young scented out by animals.

3rd. Its solitary habits. Most other shore-birds concentrate in large flocks and fly in such close formation that a well-directed shot will not only bring down a large number but mortally injure many more. Dr. Elliot Coues records a count of 210 fallen birds from a single shot from one of the old fowling pieces of those days.

Now the opposite would be the case with the Wilson Snipe. It would more likely be 210 shots for one bird. It flushes, generally, singly from under your feet as

though it had been released by a spring, and pursues such a fast zigzag course, low over the marsh vegetation, that it is hard to follow its flight, let alone draw a bead on it. But when it rises above the marsh herbage it flies straight and then it is no more a difficult target than any other bird of like size and speed. Hunting it is a favorite pastime for fast trigger sportsmen.

I have always found it a difficult bird to show anyone in the field, so one should first know what it looks like from skins, mounted specimens, or pictures, and then it can be recognized in the field by its flight and alarm calls. Another fine unmistakable field characteristic is its nuptial flight. This is performed over its nesting or prospective nesting area and is a series of deep arc dives and ascensions, not in the plane of the dive, where it continues in like manner for several minutes, each dive following the previous one to describe a circle of less than a thousand feet diameter around the nest site. The peculiar, pleasing whirring sound one hears is produced by the combination of tail feathers, held down at right angles to the body during the dive, the fast close movement of the wings to the body and the addition of the voice.

Charles W. Lockerbie, Utah Audubon Society, Salt Lake City, Utah.



A Half Hour with a Prairie Falcon

Wandering along a stream bottom in the hills northeast of Benicia, Solano County, California, on November 30, 1937, I spied at a distance of about one hundred yards a large bird sitting on a fence-post on one side of the little valley. I withdrew from my pocket my 25-power telescope, a very efficient instrument for distant observation, and assumed a comfortable position by lying on my back against a small hummock, with the four-section extensions of the glass resting between my updrawn knees, and watched the bird, a Prairie Falcon, as it perched in the sunshine of the late afternoon.

While nothing sensational happened during this period I found it very pleasant to rest after a rather long stroll and at the same time to note the activities of this interesting species. Though not rare, one does not have the opportunity of observing Prairie Falcons on every field trip in this region. The bird's entire time was spent between preening its feathers and surveying the country in all directions. The head, during these two operations, was almost continually in motion except for the short moments of observation. A full three-quarter turn of the head was often made. Preening, during the period the bird was under observation, began at the base of the neck, extending to the wings, both inner and outer surfaces, returning occasionally to the base of the tail probably to the oil gland. The body feathers, both front and back, were taken care of; one wing was stretched to its full extent, followed by stretching first one leg, then the other. For short periods it stood only on the left leg, the other being drawn a little upwards to the body feathers, and used twice to scratch the right side of the head.

The sun set over the top of the opposite hill, reducing the excellent visibility which I had enjoyed, so I approached the perching site. At about fifty yards, the so-called "vermin" sprang upwards in the air with a few heavy wing-flaps, the legs dangling for the first twenty or twenty-five feet, then drawn up into the feathers, as it sailed away on long, pointed wings into the distance after having entertained an eavesdropper into its private domestic affairs for an enjoyable half-hour.

Emerson A. Stoner, Benicia, California. January 17, 1938.



Observation of an Immature Cooper Hawk

On Sunday, February 27th, about 11 o'clock in the morning the writer was walking along the easterly shore of Lake Merced where he reached a point about midway between the pumping plant and the southerly end of the lake. From the

willows now partly submerged by high water and close to the shore line a Cooper Hawk was flushed, but apparently unafraid, it flew a distance of about fifty yards and then alighted again in the willows not more than twenty yards from the lower pathway which circles the lake.

Here it was in plain view and easily observed. It perched facing the writer with its tail spread fan-like and wings about half extended. Several times it shook itself as if attempting to dry its feathers, but as the day was overcast, there was little or no sun to help in this seeming drying-process. No other hawk was noticed in this vicinity.

Two facts indicated that it was an immature Cooper Hawk—the breast was streaked with blackish lines instead of barred with brownish ones; secondly, the bird did not show the wariness usually characteristic of an adult. It did not flush easily, refused to fly at clapping of hands, and left only when the writer approached making considerable noise as he advanced.

An excellent differentiation between the adult and the immature bird is to be found in John Richard May's book entitled "The Hawks of North America," page 28. Perhaps thirty minutes in all were spent observing this hawk.

Joseph J. Webb, San Francisco. March 3, 1938.



March Field Trip

Due to the uncertainty of the weather, only three members, Robert Wells, Charles Hansen and Harold Kirker, attended the March field trip on Sunday, the 13th. With the exception of a little rain the weather was fair.

After meeting at Fairfax we went to Tomales Bay by automobile. The most interesting observations at Tomales Bay were those of a White-tailed Kite and a Prairie Falcon; both of these species being uncommon in Marin County.

Black Brant were seen in large numbers; one flock of about 150 were feeding in the marshes along the shore. Leaving Tomales Bay we returned by the coast route to Mill Valley.

A total of sixty species was seen, as follows:

San Francisco and Richardson's Bays:

Western Grebe	Scaup Duck	Glaucous-winged Gull
Pied-billed Grebe	White-winged Scoter	California Gull
Brown Pelican	Surf Scoter	Western Gull
American Egret	Ruddy Duck	California Murre
Canvas-back Duck	American Coot	

On a small pool near Richardson's Bay: Eared Grebe; seven Buffle-heads; three Red-breasted Mergansers and American Golden-eyes.

On or near Tomales Bay:

Common Loon	Red-tailed Hawk	Western Robin
Pacific Loon	Marsh Hawk	Varied Thrush
Red-throated Loon	Prairie Falcon	Western Bluebird
Holboell Grebe	Sparrow Hawk	California Shrike
Western Grebe	Quail	Western Meadowlark
Farallon Cormorant	Allen Hummingbird	Red-winged Blackbird
Brandt Cormorant	Red-shafted Flicker	Brewer Blackbird
Baird Cormorant	Belted Kingfisher	San Francisco Towhee
California Heron	California Woodpecker	Brown Towhee
Black Brant	Black Phoebe	Lark Sparrow
American Golden-eye	American Raven	Junco
Buffle-head	Western Crow	Nuttall Sparrow
Turkey Vulture	Nicasio Jay	Song Sparrow
White-tailed Kite	Ruddy Wren-tit	

Mill Valley: Cliff Swallow; House Finch; Chickadee; English Sparrow.

Harold Kirker, Historian.

Audubon Notes

April Meeting: The regular meeting will be held on Thursday evening, the 14th, at 8 o'clock, in room 19, Ferry Building.

The speaker will be Mr. Laidlaw O. Williams of Carmel, whose subject will be "A Summer Bird Trip to the Gaspé Peninsula of Quebec." The lecture will be illustrated.

Members may bring guests.



April Field Trip will be taken on Sunday, the 24th, to Lake Merced. We will have as our guests the members of the San Jose Audubon Society.

San Francisco members will take Municipal car marked "K," transfer to "M" car and get off at Estero Station, where party will meet at 9:30 a. m. Bring luncheon. Leader: Gordon Bolander.



March Meeting: The 247th regular meeting was held on the 10th, in room 19, Ferry Building, with forty-two members and guests present. President Junea W. Kelly presiding.

The following new members were elected: Mr. Walter W. Bradley of San Francisco and Dr. E. Whitney Martin of Palo Alto.

The following observations were reported:

Harold Kirker: Black Brant, Lake Merced, February 12th; Golden-crowned Kinglets and Brown Creeper, Golden Gate Park, February 22nd.

Commander Parmenter: Brandt Cormorants with nuptial plumage, Cliff

House, February 24th; two American Rough-leg Hawks on grazing land west of Suisun marsh south of Cordelia, February 21st; White-tailed Kite, Olema, thirteen Black Brandt, Inverness, three Rufous Hummingbirds, Bolinas-Olema road, March 9th; 300± Black Brant, Bolinas, 2400± Tomales Bay, February 25th and 3000± March 9th; thirty American Golden-eyes, six Buffle-heads, Dumbarton Bridge, February 17th; one Brewster Egret, nine Buffle-heads, three Short-eared Owls, Sears Point Cut-off, February 21st.

Mr. Webb: three Baird Cormorants, Fort Point, and Horned Larks, Crissy Field, San Francisco, March 13th.

Dr. E. Whitney Martin of Stanford University told us of his observations of shore-birds around South San Francisco Bay and Pescadero. He brought many beautiful specimen skins which gave those present an exceptionally fine opportunity to compare the various species. Dr. Martin's interest in birds began in his young boyhood fifty years ago. His humorous account of these early beginnings and his experience as a taxidermist evoked a great deal of laughter from his listeners.



Observations: Members are requested to bring their records in writing and leave copy with the Editor. Early and late dates and unusual observations are especially wanted. Kindly arrange them in the following order: name of bird, place where seen and date.

Audubon Association of the Pacific

Organized January 25, 1917

For the Study and the Protection of Birds

President.....	Mrs. G. Earle Kelly.....	1311 Grand St., Alameda, Calif.
Corresponding Secretary.....	C. B. Lastreto.....	260 California St., San Francisco
Treasurer.....	Mrs. A. B. Stephens.....	1695 Filbert St., San Francisco

Monthly meeting second Thursday, 8 P. M., Room 19, Ferry Building.

Address Bulletin correspondence to Mrs. A. B. Stephens, Editor, 1695 Filbert St., San Francisco.

Membership dues, payable January 1st, \$3.00 per year.

Student memberships, \$1.50 per year.

Life memberships, \$50.00.

Members are responsible for dues until written notice of resignation is received by Treasurer.